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### Material and Motion: Phenomenology and the Early Work of Carolee Schneemann 1957-1973

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MATERIAL AND MOTION: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE EARLY WORK OF  
CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN 1957 - 1973

by

Regina M. Flowers

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Art History

Under the Supervision of Professor Marissa Vigneault

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MATERIAL AND MOTION: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE EARLY WORK OF  
CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN 1957 - 1973

Regina M. Flowers, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2011

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Carolee Schneemann is a multidisciplinary artist known for using her body in her artworks in order to engage with issues of sexuality, gender and identity. Best known for her 1975 performance *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann's work is most often theorized in connection with the emergence of Feminist, Performance and Body Art, yet Schneemann has always considered herself primarily a painter. In this thesis I address the disconnect between Schneemann's repeated insistence on her status as a painter and the scholarly discussion of her work solely in relation to the integration of her body in her performative works. The period covered in this thesis, 1957-1963, entails the introduction of Schneemann's body and performance to her practice in painting, and the creation of some of her most prominent works: *Eye Body* (1963), *Meat Joy* (1964), and *Fuses* (1964-66).

I use French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology as a theoretical lens through which to read Schneemann's work, and address the importance of painting to her overall practice. I specifically focus on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of materiality and movement signifying a depiction of the lived experience, found in his three essays on modern painting: "Cezanne's Doubt," "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," and "Eye and Mind." Reading Schneemann's work in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's writings on art creates a bridge between Schneemann's relationship to feminist artistic practice and her interest in the formal aspects of painting by way of

Schneemann's and Merleau-Ponty's shared interest in the breakdown of dichotomies between mind/body and subject/object, ultimately creating a more nuanced understanding of her work in relation to painting and performance.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Background*

*painting  
extension of materiality*

*MATERIAL AND MOTION.....towards new emotion resources*

*The environment and who we are*

*we are working out who we are – how we are ourselves -- with audacity and the kind of acceptance that makes action possible.<sup>1</sup>*

The above series of typed statements come from the Carolee Schneemann Papers at the Getty Museum in a folder of miscellaneous preparatory materials for Schneemann's 1979 book *More Than Meat Joy*, which documents her performance works between 1960 to 1978. These affirmations also serve as the basis for my study of her work.

Schneemann, a contemporary, multidisciplinary artist who is still very active in the art world, gained attention in the 1960s for work that is considered foundational for Feminist and Performance Art. The statements highlight the necessity of painting to her process; it is the materiality of paint that makes her performative works possible. Though primarily known for her erotic imagery and the use of her own body as material for her work, Schneemann received a traditional training in painting at Bard College and the University of Illinois. In this thesis I aim to address the importance of painting to Schneemann's overall practice by using French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology as a theoretical lens through which to read her art.

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<sup>1</sup> Background, November 1965, 950001, series I, box 7, folder 6, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

Within contemporary criticism, Schneemann's work is most often theorized in connection with the emergence of Feminist and Body Art.<sup>2</sup> The writings of Amelia Jones are significant in this regard, placing Body Art in a space between modernist and post-modernist artistic practice. Jones describes Formalism, a touchstone of High Modernism, as reliant upon disinterestedness and disembodiment, arguing that the inclusion of the body as material in Body Art marks a shift between modernist and post-modernist work, evidenced in the various readings of the gestural paintings of Jackson Pollock in contemporary art criticism, including Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg and Allan Kaprow.<sup>3</sup> Jones recognizes the aesthetic and performative connections of Schneemann to the Abstract Expressionists, citing the inclusion of her body as working "within the language of Abstract Expressionism, but against the grain of its masculinist assumptions."<sup>4</sup> Yet Jones begins her consideration of Schneemann's work with *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (fig. 1), which marks the first inclusion of her moving body in her art, rather than her earlier practice in painting. Rebecca Schneider, unlike Jones, places Body Art within the precedents of modernism and the historical avant-garde in her book *The Explicit Body in Performance*.<sup>5</sup> Schneider acknowledges Schneemann's background in painting, and briefly addresses her early paintings and painting-constructions. But, as with Jones, it is only *Eye Body* that receives a complete analysis by Schneider.

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<sup>2</sup>See Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Jacki Wilson, *The Happy Stripper: Pleasures and Politics of the New Burlesque* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, *Body Art*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 21.



It is in the writings of Kristine Stiles that the intersection of painting and performance in Schneemann's work is best understood. Stiles first acknowledges the need to address Schneemann's painting and performance work alongside each other in her essay "*Schlaget Auf: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann's Painting*," published in the 1996 catalogue for Schneemann's first retrospective, *Up To and Including Her Limits*, at the New Museum in New York City.<sup>6</sup> In this essay Stiles links Schneemann's practice to Paul Cézanne, a connection that she later expands on in "The Painter as an Instrument of Real Time," included in Schneemann's publication, *Imaging Her Erotics* (2003). Stiles makes clear that understanding Schneemann's painting and performance as interrelated is essential, stating, "without understanding how her work relates to the problems of painting, the larger contribution Carolee Schneemann has made to the histories of art may continue to be occluded by the artist herself."<sup>7</sup> According to Stiles, Schneemann's use of her body as material has obstructed other considerations of her work, particularly its relation to vision and the formal properties of painting.<sup>8</sup>

Stiles believes that Schneemann's particular contribution to art history is her ability to "draw the eye back to the body that sees: both to the body's inextricable connection to what is seen and to its role in determining the nature of the seen."<sup>9</sup> Drawing the eye back to the body is a way of expressing a lived experience, an embodied subject. This idea is formulated extensively in Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology, a

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<sup>6</sup> Kristine Stiles, "*Schlaget Auf: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann's Painting*," in *Carolee Schneemann: Up To And Including Her Limits* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Kristine Stiles, "The Painter as an Instrument of Real Time," in *Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Stiles believes historians have focused almost solely on Schneemann's use of her body and feminist groundings in discussion of her work. Amelia Jones places herself in opposition to this claim in her footnotes to "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art," in *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Stiles, "The Painter as an Instrument of RealTime," 11.

philosophical movement based on the study of consciousness and experiences as subjective and embodied.<sup>10</sup> In their writings Jones and Schneider both address the relationship between phenomenology and Body Art, linking the emergence of Schneemann's body as material to the theoretical breakdown of Cartesian mind/body dualism and the subject/object dichotomy. Yet, in doing so they privilege her performative work over her paintings.<sup>11</sup> It is from this location, between Schneemann's engagement within Feminist and Body Art, and the need for a critical examination of the importance of painting to her process, that I insert my own voice into this discussion. I forge connections between Schneemann's multiple processes in painting and performance between the years 1957-1973, utilizing Merleau-Ponty's three essays on modern painting, "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945), "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," (1952), and "Eye and Mind" (1960).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology evolved out of the theories of philosopher, Edmund Husserl. Galen A. Johnson in his "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cézanne's Doubt,'" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) describes Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Husserl's theories as "a new way of describing the meaning of human experience that would not fall prey to...the problems of mind and body," to free itself from, "Cartesian philosophical tradition, particularly that of the subject-object, self-world split," (8). Merleau-Ponty is often associated with French existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, which Amelia Jones does in *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), stating that Merleau-Ponty's is an "existential phenomenology which understands the consciousness always in relation to its others and the world," (255).

<sup>11</sup> For feminist interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology see Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Luce Irigaray, "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty," *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Elizabeth Grosz, "Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh," in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). The most extensive use of a feminist phenomenology in relation to Body Art is Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> All three of Merleau-Ponty's writings on art were published in English in 1964. "Cézanne's Doubt" in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Herbert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964); "Indirect Languages and the Voices of Silence" was translated the same year in *Signs* trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964); and "Eye and Mind" in *The Primary of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* trans. and ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Here I

Within this sixteen year span Schneemann moved from a singular practice in painting during her undergraduate years at Bard College, to an interest in breaking down the picture plane in her “painting-constructions” and the creation of her first environment, made while a graduate student at the University of Illinois. I also address Schneemann’s participation in the Judson Dance Theater and the creation of some of her most highly regarded works, *Eye Body* (fig. 1), *Meat Joy* (fig. 2), and *Fuses* (fig. 3), all produced shortly after her move to New York City in 1961. I use Schneemann’s work to analyze how her interest in embodiment is related to her explorations in painting. I specifically examine how the concepts of materiality and motion are theorized by Merleau-Ponty in his writings on art to signify a depiction of a lived experience. By making this connection I intend to show that Schneemann’s paintings are absolutely integral to understanding her larger artistic practice.<sup>13</sup>

Chapter One explores Schneemann’s insistence that no matter what medium she uses, she is a painter. Schneemann theorizes her process in relation to the presentation of space and gesture found in the works of Paul Cézanne and Jackson Pollock, as well as her feminist concerns about the objectification of the female body in art. Starting with Schneemann’s artistic connection to Cézanne and Pollock, I place her work within the context of American art criticism of the 1950s and 1960s. I understand Schneemann’s position as a complicated one, specifically engaging with and reacting against the main theoretical arguments of the period, notably the formalist theories of Clement Greenberg

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am citing these essays from *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. ed. Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> The role of painting in Schneemann’s practice has recently begun to be reconsidered through exhibitions. See *Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What It Became*, ed. Maura Reilly (New York: P.P.O.W and Project Projects, 2009) and *Carolee Schneemann: Within and Beyond the Premises* (New Paltz: Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art and State University of New York at New Paltz, 2010).

and Michael Fried and the performative theories of Harold Rosenberg and Allan Kaprow. I then introduce Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology as an alternative way of understanding materiality and movement in painting and performance within Schneemann's practice.

Chapter Two explores Schneemann's landscape and figurative paintings from the late 1950s to her 1963 performative work *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (fig. 1) with a focus on materiality—the physical qualities of paint, gesture, and their relationship to the body of both the artist and the viewer. Included in this period is Schneemann's graduate work at the University of Illinois where she first broke down the picture plane by collaging various materials into her paintings, and created her first interactive event, *Labyrinths* (1960). Here Merleau-Ponty's writings on materiality offer a way to understand the connections between the presence of paint and the body, and I demonstrate how these connections directly relate to the introduction of Schneemann's body as material in *Eye Body*.

In Chapter Three, Schneemann's prominent works *Eye Body* (fig 1), *Fuses* (fig 3) and *Meat Joy* (fig 2) are theorized in terms of movement, expanding on the physicality of the painted gesture. Schneemann's understanding of gesture as an event led to the inclusion of performance into her work in painting. Merleau-Ponty believed that movement illustrated the union of mind and body. Through the introduction of her body in motion to her process, Schneemann presents her body not as an object, but as an active creator in her work. This contributes not only to the breakdown of mind/body dualism, but also the patriarchal dichotomy that only allows the female body to be object and not subject.

Schneemann herself has continually emphasized the connection between painting and performance in her work. My thesis recognizes the artist's voice, drawing from her interviews, publications, and archives, while still placing her within the historical context of the contemporaneous interpretations of Greenberg, Fried, Rosenberg and Kaprow, as well as more recent theorizations of Body Art and its relationship to feminism found in the writings of Jones, Schneider, and Stiles. Using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a theoretical approach, and joining Stiles in recognizing the importance of painting to Schneemann's process, I solidify Schneemann's placement within both modernist and postmodernist practices.

By understanding Schneemann's work solely within postmodern performativity, the importance of painting for Schneemann is denied. Considered, in relation to the turn away from embodied art in the 1980s, Schneemann's work was negatively regarded as essentialist rather than postmodern, illustrated by Stiles who acknowledges Schneemann's lack of placement in the art historical cannon, stating, "younger artists, working from her tradition and example, rose to unprecedented acclaim."<sup>14</sup> Placing Schneemann's work within the modernist art historical lineage, a seemingly conservative move, while utilizing Merleau-Ponty's theoretical writings on art, allows Schneemann to retain her relationship to the feminist goal of the lived experience without rejecting her interest in the formal aspects of painting. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of Schneemann's work in relation to painting and performance, as well as within modernist and postmodernist practices.

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<sup>14</sup> Kristine Stiles, "Introduction," in *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle*, ed. Kristine Stiles (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xlvii.

## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Despite being known almost exclusively for her work in Body and Performance Art, specifically her performances *Meat Joy* (fig. 2) and *Interior Scroll* (fig. 4), Carolee Schneemann has always grounded her artistic practice in painting. Schneemann reinforced this position in 1993, declaring, “I’m a painter. I’m still a painter and I will die a painter. Everything that I have developed has to do with extending visual principles off the canvas.”<sup>15</sup> The divergence of Schneemann’s background as a painter and her art historical position as exclusively a body artist has rarely been discussed outside of her own publications, which is surprising given her repeated insistence on the role of painting in her work.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to Stephanie Stebich and Rebecca Solnit regarding her inclusion in an exhibition, *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century*, Schneemann lays out what she sees as the theoretical positions with which her works engage:

In my origins as a landscape painter, the implications of Cézanne’s structuring of space colluded with de Kooning’s dematerialization of the fixed picture plane. At this early juncture, figurations of the historic nude and the changing position of the viewer opened a perceptual slippage into time as motion to provide a physical motive: (here my body entered sculptural space as an active and activating form). My use of the body in conjunction with my early painting-constructions and the development of my Kinetic Theater in the later 1960s both visually and physically vitalized a conceptual and ‘painterly’ space. Reference to the optical

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<sup>15</sup> Schneemann as quoted in *Imaging Her Erotics: Carolee Schneemann* (1993; VHS, 5 mins), a video collaboration between Carolee Schneemann and Maria Beatty. Reprinted in *Carolee Schneemann, Painting, What It Became*. Edited by Maura Reilly (New York: P.P.O.W, with Project Projects, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See Kristine Stiles, “*Schlaget Auf*: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann’s Paintings,” and Dan Cameron, “In the Flesh,” in *Up To and Including Her Limits* ed. Kathy Brew (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996); Kristin Stiles, “The Painter as an Instrument of Real Time,” in *Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); *Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What It Became*, ed. Maura Reilly (New York: P.P.O.W and Project Projects, 2009) and *Carolee Schneemann: Within and Beyond the Premises* (New Paltz: Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art and State University of New York at New Paltz, 2010).

layers, overlapping planes and dense tonalities of landscape continued as influences.<sup>17</sup>

Schneemann aligns her work within the modernist-postmodernist divide, with concerns over the presentation of space in the work of Paul Cézanne and the gestural brushstroke of Willem de Kooning on one side, and her feminist concerns over the use of the female body in art, from the “historic nude,” to the use of her own body as subject, on the other. She further connects these aesthetic and political concerns to her inclusion of movement and the activation of the viewer within her development of Kinetic Theater, events comparable to the Happenings of the late 1950s. It is from this position, between High Modernist painting and the development of Happenings, Performance and Body Art, that the work of Schneemann is best understood.

In Schneemann’s publication, *Cézanne, She was a Great Painter*, she names Cézanne as one of her first artistic influences, at the age of twelve. Schneemann wrote, “I decided a painter named ‘Cezanne’ would be my mascot; I would assume Cézanne was unquestionably a woman—after all the ‘anne’ in it was feminine.”<sup>18</sup> She continues, “If Cézanne could do it, I could do it.”<sup>19</sup> In 1951, Schneemann was looking for a history of women artists, a history she could not find in the monographs from her local library. Instead, she was confronted with a long line of male artists for whom women are only present as objects and models. In the 1950s there was no feminist art history. It was not

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<sup>17</sup> Carolee Schneemann, “CS to Stephanie Stebich and Rebecca Solnit, 15 April 1993,” in *Correspondence Course: an Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and her Circle*, ed. Kristine Stiles (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 424. The exhibition, *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century*, was organized by the Denver Art Museum and the Columbus Museum of Art and was on view from May 14-September 11, 1994 at the Denver Art Museum and October 18-January 8, 1995 at the Columbus Museum of Art. Photographs of *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Acts* were included in the exhibition. See Martin Friedman et al., *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century* (Denver Art Museum and Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Cézanne: She was a Great Painter* (Springtown: Tresspass Press, 1975), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

until 1971, ten years after Schneemann completed graduate school, that feminist art history was established with Linda Nochlin's foundational essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"<sup>20</sup> Schneemann, in her re-gendering of Cézanne, attempted to create a particular history and lineage for herself as a modern woman artist at a time when none was available to her.

Schneemann's interest in Cézanne also stemmed from the formal elements of his work, specifically his use of line and representation of space through multiple planes, as opposed to linear one-point perspective. Schneemann addressed Cézanne's technique primarily during graduate school.<sup>21</sup> Between the years 1958-1966, Schneemann wrote, "my eyes moved to Cézanne; the rigor of the action of paint in space was nowhere more demanding than in his works—my longing for the richness (engulfing preconceived notions about what was an expressive image and extensiveness of natural form took courage and challenge from his experience."<sup>22</sup> Schneemann's interest in Cézanne is seen in her 1959 landscape painting, *Untitled, October 1959* (fig. 5). The background does not recede behind the foreground as it would in a work utilizing one-point perspective. Instead, the foreground and background both appear to sit on the surface of the canvas, confusing the points of view. The tall grass in the lower section of the canvas is viewed from slightly above, while the trees in the upper section of the canvas are viewed straight on. The conflation of space is reinforced with the overall treatment of paint, one

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<sup>20</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No great Women Artists?" ARTNews 70 (1971): 22-39 and 67-71.

<sup>21</sup> Schneemann received her bachelor's degree from Bard College in 1959, and then continued on to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign where she received her Masters of Fine Arts in painting in 1960.

<sup>22</sup> Notations, November 1965, 950001, series III, box 27, folder 6, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.



reminiscent of Cézanne's uniform application. Everything in the picture plane is unified by Schneemann's short dashes of line and color.

In addition to Schneemann's interest in Cézanne, she was also well-versed in the prominent style of painting in mid-century America, Abstract Expressionism, which still reigned during the time she was in graduate school. Schneemann, in her publications and interviews, has cited the gestural markings of Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, as well as the dematerialization of the picture plane as playing a part in her artistic process. Another painting from 1959, *Landscape* (fig 6), shows Schneemann's interest in de Kooning's abstract gesture. In the center, on the right side of the canvas, is a realistic representation of a landscape. Present are a horizon line, blue sky and an indication of vegetation due to the use of green and yellow paint, but this allusion to land is only part of the canvas. The rest is overrun by a flurry of expressionist strokes, an explosion of color and a flattening of space through Schneemann's integration of the Abstract Expressionistic gesture. In 1960, concurrent with her completion of graduate school, Clement Greenberg, the prominent critic who championed the work of Pollock and de Kooning, published "Modernist Painting" in which he addressed Cézanne's presentation of space, and identified it as the key to what he called 'modernist painting,' now referred to as Abstract Expressionism.

In "Modernist Painting," Greenberg declares that the only way for Modernism to prevent itself from a "leveling down," which would relegate the role of arts to that of entertainment and therapy, is for modernist art to turn inwards, towards its own means of

representation.<sup>23</sup> That is, Greenberg believed that only what is unique and irreducible to art should be the subject, and he argued that what is unique to art depends on the medium. As such, “the task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific elements of each art any and every effect that might be conceivably borrowed from or by the medium of any other art.”<sup>24</sup> In terms of painting, Greenberg defined flatness as specific to the medium and thus the primary concern of painters.<sup>25</sup>

For Greenberg, the privileging of flatness is the hallmark of a modernist perspective. The use of perspective to create illusionistic space opposes the flatness of the canvases which modernist works champion. In his account of the “progress” of nineteenth and twentieth century western art, Greenberg heralds Édouard Manet and the Impressionists for turning painting towards the optical and away from the presentation of deep space.<sup>26</sup> According to Greenberg, the flatness Modernism achieved in the works of Manet and the Impressionists is denied by the Post-Impressionist painter Cézanne, who “in the name of the sculptural...reacted against Impressionism.”<sup>27</sup> Cézanne focused on solidity of forms and produced forms that Greenberg considered sculptural because of their sense of weight and mass. Greenberg was explicit in his critique of the sculptural in painting; he believed for painting to achieve autonomy it must divorce itself of any relation with the sculptural, and instead privilege the optical by pursuing flatness.<sup>28</sup>

Summing up his argument, Greenberg said the Old Masters created a space that viewers

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<sup>23</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism* vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

could imagine themselves walking into while the Modernist painters created a space that one could travel into, though only optically.

Schneemann has not commented directly on Greenberg's theories, but the artists she has chosen to engage with and her own statements about "sculptural" and "painterly" space, implicitly invite comparison. Schneemann did not adopt the illusionistic one-point perspective, but she also did not turn to pure flatness. Rather, she favored Cézanne's solution to creating space. Additionally, by integrating painting-constructions and performance into her practice of painting, Schneemann extended the 'sculptural' space of Cézanne into the space of the viewer. Ultimately Schneemann's position in relation to Abstract Expressionism, where the body and psyche of the artist becomes the implicit subject of flat, non-representational painting, and Greenberg with whom she shared an interest in Pollock, is complicated and debatable, as is her relationship to another major theorist of the period, Michael Fried.

In his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood," Fried, a follower of Greenberg, argued that Minimalism, or literalist art, as he referred to it, is a deviation from Greenberg's definitions of modernist painting and sculpture.<sup>29</sup> As the title suggests, Fried created a separation between art and what he calls "objecthood." For Fried, "objecthood" is what lies outside of his definition of modernist art, relating more closely to theater, or, "what lies between the arts."<sup>30</sup> The crucial distinction between modern art, and the minimalist

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 149.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

art of Donald Judd and Robert Morris is that their work engages the viewer, writing “the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation.”<sup>31</sup>

Fried believed that art degenerates as it approaches the theatrical.<sup>32</sup> By laying out his argument in this way, Fried dismissed the work of contemporary artists, including Schneemann, who rejected the Greenbergian belief in the separation of artistic mediums and instead created works that are an amalgamation of artistic styles, mediums, and practices including theater and film. Fried believed a distinction must be preserved, especially between the pictorial and the theatrical, in order to preserve art’s value and quality:

For example, a failure to register the enormous difference in quality, between, say, the music of Elliott Carter and that of John Cage or between the paintings of Louis and those of Robert Rauschenberg means that the real distinctions—between music and theater in the first instance and between painting and theater in the second—are displaced by the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling and that the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive, highly desirable synthesis.<sup>33</sup>

Fried’s concern over this “synthesis” stems from his dismissal of the neo-avant-garde artistic practice of the 1950s and 1960s. At mid-century Cage and Rauschenberg, along with Merce Cunningham and Allan Kaprow, ushered in a new experimental approach to artistic practice, one that finds its roots in Kaprow’s and Harold Rosenberg’s writing.

Rosenberg, in his 1952 article “The American Action Painters,” declared the canvas of the American painters to be “an arena in which to act,” as what is on the canvas

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<sup>31</sup> Fried, 153. In Fried’s notation of the engagement of the viewer in relation to Minimalist art he is indebted to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which he cites in “An Introduction to My Art Criticism” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18. Robert Morris has also cited Merleau-Ponty as an influence, but to opposing ends. See Annette Michelson, “Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression,” in *Robert Morris* (Washington D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969); Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

is “not a picture but an event.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike Greenberg and Fried, Rosenberg did not attempt to create a modernist lineage for this new action painting. Instead, Rosenberg saw the work of the American action painters as distinct and separate from other forms of modern art, writing, “call this painting ‘abstract’ or ‘Expressionist’ or ‘Abstract-Expressionist,’ what counts is its special motive for extinguishing the object, which is not the same as in other abstract or Expressionist phases of modern art.”<sup>35</sup> Unlike Fried, who attempted to strengthen the divide between what is art and what is theater, Rosenberg saw the new action painting as breaking down distinctions between art and life.<sup>36</sup> This argument would be taken up later by Kaprow, who used it to reject the formalist theories of Greenberg and to support his development of Happenings, defined as an “art form in which all manner of materials, color, sounds, odors, and common objects and events were orchestrated in ways that approximated the spectacle of modern everyday life.”<sup>37</sup>

Rosenberg believed anything that related to action was relevant to action painting, including “psychology, philosophy, history, mythology, hero worship.”<sup>38</sup> What is not included on this list is art criticism. Rosenberg believed the only way in which the formal elements of a painting’s, “rightness of color, texture, balance, etc.” should be discussed is by way of psychology, and the way in which the painting relates back to and tell us something of the artist and their experience.<sup>39</sup> The true test for Rosenberg of the seriousness of this new painting then is “the degree to which the act on the canvas is an

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<sup>34</sup> Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” in *The Tradition of the New* ed. Harold Rosenberg (Jackson: Da Capo Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Jeff Kelley, “Introduction,” in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, by Allan Kaprow, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xii.

<sup>38</sup> Rosenberg, 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

extension of the artist's total effort to make over an experience."<sup>40</sup> Though Rosenberg does not name any action painters specifically, the painter he had in mind in regards to this statement was Pollock.

Both Greenberg and Rosenberg employ Pollock, but in support of opposing practices. For Greenberg, Pollock is representative of a formalist understanding of modernist painting and its pursuit of flatness. In Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters," it is the act of painting, specifically the gesture, that takes precedence; Pollock's paintings are seen a record of this action. Though not an Abstract Expressionist per se, Schneemann's art similarly negotiated the discussion of pictorial space raised by Greenberg and the importance of action and gesture as championed by Rosenberg. Adding another laying of significance, Schneemann, contemporaneously aware of the debate over Pollock, the "heroic" (male) artist, responded by creating her performance *Up To and Including Her Limits* (fig. 14), in which she revised the Abstract Expressionist gesture as linked to the naked female body, a work discussed in detail in the conclusion.

Pollock was also the inspiration for another influential critic and artist, Kaprow, who advocated the performative aspects of Abstract Expressionism. Kaprow's reading of Pollock is integral to Schneemann's placement in art historical discourse. Coinciding with the development of Happenings, Schneemann moved her work outside the pictorial space of the canvas to include performative actions with her process and her body as an acceptable artistic material. The same year that Rosenberg published his "The American Action Painters," the experimental musician John Cage organized an event at Black Mountain College in North Carolina that included the dances of Cunningham, paintings

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33.

by Rauschenberg and a lecture by Cage.<sup>41</sup> The Black Mountain College event served as a catalyst for the development of Happenings. Kaprow in his 1958 essay, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” in turn linked Happenings to the performative qualities of Pollock’s paintings. The large scale of his paintings, for Kaprow, is what shifts Pollock’s work from painting to environments that activate the viewers, who, through this activation, become participants instead of observers.<sup>42</sup>

The participation of the viewers, which Kaprow championed, is what Fried criticized the work of the Minimalist artists for, nine years later, while alluding to Greenberg’s flattening of pictorial space. In Kaprow’s writing the pictorial space of the Abstract Expressionists instead expands into the space of the viewer. Kaprow wrote, “in the present case the ‘picture’ has moved so far out that the canvas is no longer a reference point.”<sup>43</sup> According to Kaprow, when the canvas is no longer needed as a reference point in the work we are at a point where “we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life.”<sup>44</sup> He continues that we must “utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch.”<sup>45</sup> The implication of a new art form preoccupied with everyday life, which Kaprow termed Happenings, is that artists no longer needed to work in medium specific ways. Kaprow concludes, “young artists of today need no longer say, ‘I am a painter’ or ‘a poet’ or ‘a dancer.’ They are simply ‘artists.’”<sup>46</sup> The belief, that artists need not be defined by their practice

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Schimmel, “Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object,” in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art and Thames and Hudson, 1998), 21.

<sup>42</sup> Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

accords with Schneemann's Kinetic Theater, but is at odds with her repeated self-identification as a painter, again illustrating how complicated Schneemann's position is within the prominent theories of mid-century modern art.

Kaprow is best known for his 1959 event *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* staged at the Reuben gallery in New York City, from which he derived the name Happenings for his new art form.<sup>47</sup> Kaprow's *18 Happenings*, in conjunction with the influence of Cage, Cunningham and their Black Mountain College event, ushered in performance on the art scene, which included the organization of the Fluxus movement in 1961 and the establishment of the Judson Dance Theater in 1962.<sup>48</sup> Schneemann, who moved to New York City in 1961, was an active participant in the turn towards performance in her role as a founding member of the Judson Dance Theater.

The Judson Memorial Church in New York City was a site that advocated and organized experimental artistic practice in the 1960s. Thanks to the minister, Howard Moody and the congregation, artists found support at the liberal protest church located in Greenwich Village, a space which fostered the creation of the Judson Gallery in 1958, the Poet's Theater in 1961 and the Judson Dance Theater in 1962.<sup>49</sup> The Judson Gallery was located in the basement of the church and was led by Kaprow from 1959-1960, who showed the works of Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Tom Wesselmann.<sup>50</sup> Concurrently, in 1960, Cage asked one of his students, composer Robert Dunn, to teach a dance composition class at Cunningham's studio in New York City.<sup>51</sup> Dunn's course developed

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<sup>47</sup> Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 53.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Sayre, *Object of Performance: the American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 13.

<sup>49</sup> Banes, 251.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



into the foundation of the Judson Dance Theater, also located at Judson Memorial Church.<sup>52</sup> Dunn organized the first Judson Dance Theater event in 1962, presenting dances from his course at Cunningham's studio.<sup>53</sup> The members of the Judson Dance Theater were not only dancers, but also writers, visual artists, musicians and filmmakers, and included Schneemann, who was introduced to the Judson Dance Theater in 1962, by the composers Philip Corner and Malcolm Goldstein.<sup>54</sup> Corner had asked Schneemann to create a piece for the Living Theater in May 1962, which she titled *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion*, and in which Goldstein participated.<sup>55</sup> This performance led to Schneemann's invitation to join the Judson group and a three-year collaboration between Schneemann and the Judson Dance Theater.<sup>56</sup>

Schneemann's first piece for the Judson group, *Newspaper Event* (fig.7), was performed in January 1963.<sup>57</sup> In *Newspaper Event*, the eight performers created a mound of crumpled newspaper on and around which they performed their actions.<sup>58</sup> Ramsay Burt, in *Judson Dance Theater, Performative Traces*, relates Schneemann's direction of the action to painting, stating, "she treated the performance space as her canvas and the dancers as if they were paint or elements with which to compose moving pictures."<sup>59</sup> Burt's understanding of *Newspaper Event* echoes Schneemann's in *More Than Meat Joy*, in which she wrote that she felt "no resistance as a painter who had in effect enlarged her canvas, to prepare movement events based on the physical qualities of the others present.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>53</sup> Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 44.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Performers included Arlene Rothlein, Ruth Emerson, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Carol Summers, Elaine Summers, John Worden and Carolee Schneemann.

<sup>59</sup> Burt, 111.

I was intrigued by the particularities of the performers in the group; I thought of them as a sort of physical ‘palette’.”<sup>60</sup> Rosenberg’s idea of the canvas as an “arena for action” paved the way for Schneemann’s understanding of *Newspaper Event* and its relationship to painting. Schneemann later noted the principles behind the piece: “1) the primary experience of the body as your own environment. 2) the body within the actual, particular environment. 3) the materials of that environment – soft, responsive, tactile, active, malleable (paper...paper). 4) the active environment of one another. 5) the visual structure of the bodies and materials defining the space.”<sup>61</sup> The experience of one’s own body, bodily action, and the body’s relationship to surrounding materials and environment were her primary concerns.

The statements Schneemann made in regards to *Newspaper Event* may be understood in relation to the theories of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Specific connections exist between Schneemann’s understanding of the primacy of the experience of one’s own body and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the “lived body,” the subject as a “being-in-the-world.” In terms of Schneemann’s process, the relationship to the lived body was found in *Newspaper Event* through the association created between the material and the body, as well as the connection between the painted gesture and the body in movement.

The theories of Merleau-Ponty unite Schneemann’s dual practice in painting and performance. Not surprisingly, the relationship between Body Art and Merleau-Ponty has been cited by scholars, who have, connected Merleau-Ponty’s theories on the primacy of perception and lived experience to the presentation of the artist’s body, arguing that

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<sup>60</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New York: Documentext, 1979), 32.

<sup>61</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 33.

stressing the body's connection to consciousness, denies the Enlightenment dichotomy of subject/object.<sup>62</sup> While valid, I believe this one-sided application of Merleau-Ponty's theory terms of Schneemann's practice denies the importance of painting to her entire body of production and dismisses aspects of her work that deal with the formal issues of painting, including gesture and perspective. Schneemann acknowledged the academic privileging of her performative works over her paintings in this context in an interview for her 2003 publication, *Imaging Her Erotics*, in which she stated:

All my work evolves from my history as a painter: all the objects, installations, film, video, performance—things that are formed. But the performative works—which are one aspect of this larger body of work—are all that the culture can hold onto. That fascination overrides the rest of the work. It is too silly, but is still kind of a mind/body split. 'If you are going to represent physicality and carnality, we cannot give you intellectual authority.'<sup>63</sup>

Echoing Kristine Stiles' statement about Schneemann's work being occluded by her use of her body, Schneemann links the privileging of her performance work to another kind of mind/body split in which her use of her body has kept critics and historians from acknowledging the larger theoretical issues at play. A closer engagement with the theories of Merleau-Ponty, one that includes his writings on painting, can show how a unified process underlies both her painting and performance. Schneemann's and Merleau-Ponty's appreciation of the work of Cézanne provides an entry point to their

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<sup>62</sup> Cindy Nemser in 1971, linked phenomenology to Body Art by quoting Merleau-Ponty in the beginning of her article, "Subject-Object Body Art," *Art Magazine* 46, n. 1 (September-October 1971): 38-42. Artists such as Robert Morris and Vito Acconci have both expressed interest in phenomenology and have been theorized in context with the theories of Merleau-Ponty. See Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris* (Washington D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969); Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) and Kate Linker, *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994). Amelia Jones cites all these sources and sets up her own feminist-poststructuralist reading in her works: "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Arts Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 11-18. *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and "Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning," in *Performing the Body Performing the Text* eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> Kate Haug, "An Interview with Carolee Schneemann," *Wide Angle* 20.1 (1998): 23.

common engagement with issues of materiality and movement in the presentation of lived experience.

Merleau-Ponty referenced Cézanne in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), but his first definitive foray into Aesthetics is in his 1945 article “Cezanne’s Doubt,” in which the artist’s attempt to paint the lived experience of the world is explored.<sup>64</sup> Merleau-Ponty understood Cézanne’s paintings as the artist’s attempt to paint nature as he experienced it, without using the illusionistic technique of one-point perspective. In “Cézanne’s Doubt,” Merleau-Ponty writes that “Cézanne discovered what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one.”<sup>65</sup> Galen A. Johnson summarizes this idea in his book *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, stating that in “Cézanne’s Doubt” Cézanne’s painting practice is understood by Merleau-Ponty to be “a theory of artistic creation as the fusion of self and world, not imitation of the world as object by painter as subject, nor a subjective projection of the world by an artist’s imagination.”<sup>66</sup> Cézanne’s work had implications for Merleau-Ponty’s other major writing on art, “Eye and Mind” (1961), in which he reiterates the importance of the body to painting, based on the connected nature of mind and body.<sup>67</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s theories break down the dualism between mind and body, as well as subject and object, through a discourse based on the body. Likewise, Schneemann’s performative, works in which her

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<sup>64</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 64.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid..

<sup>66</sup> Galen A Johnson, “Phenomenology and Painting: ‘Cézanne’s Doubt,’” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>67</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 123.

body is material, have also been understood as attacking these dichotomies. But her paintings have significance in this regard, as well.

Kristine Stiles has paved the way for a reconsideration of the importance of Schneemann's paintings in "*Schlaget Auf*: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann's Painting," citing Schneemann's study of "the ocular phenomena of painting," her concept of the eye, and her "approach to action...rooted in painting," as all contributing to her larger goal of "mind-body unity."<sup>68</sup> Stiles sums up the influence of Cézanne on Schneemann's artistic practice, first in painting and then in her assemblage, body and performance work, writing:

Her early drawings, paintings, and constructions transparently reveal how she took her cue from Cézanne, especially his 'Bathers' paintings. But in her use of materials that cover the body, especially the shredded and collaged newspapers she used in so many Happenings and performances, Schneemann vastly expanded on Cézanne's technique of passage by translating and transforming its static patches of interlocking pigments into moving elements.<sup>69</sup>

What Stiles makes explicit here is the importance of the *materiality* of Schneemann's artistic medium, whether it is paint, collaged newspaper, or the raw flesh in *Meat Joy* (fig. 2), paired with physical *movement* of the body that leads to the inclusion of Happenings and performances into her process. Materiality and movement, the elements that Schneemann draws and expands on from Cézanne, are also the key concepts in Merleau-Ponty's theory of the lived perspective, which I address in Chapter Two and Chapter Three to further strengthen the connections that I believe need to be made between Schneemann's work in painting and performance.

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<sup>68</sup> Stiles, "*Schlaget Auf*," 17-18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

## CHAPTER 2: MATERIAL

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy focused on the study of consciousness, based in the works of Edmund Husserl. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of his former students, understood Husserl's theories as leading to a breakdown of the Cartesian mind/body split.<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty expanded upon this in his work *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he emphasized that consciousness is embodied, that the body is inseparable from the mind, and any theory of the body is a theory of perception.<sup>71</sup> Perception is integral to this equation because it requires both the body and the mind, denying a division between the two. According to Merleau-Ponty perception defines our relationship with our environment through the senses, and while all the senses depend on each other, vision is primary.<sup>72</sup> In respect to the arts, Merleau-Ponty described painting as an outgrowth of perception, particularly in the work of Paul Cézanne. Merleau-Ponty understood Cézanne's practice as a fusion of self and world, returning often to a quote from Cézanne: "the landscape thinks itself in me...I am its consciousness."<sup>73</sup> Merleau-Ponty used this statement to demonstrate that painting is a "process of expression," the expression of a lived perspective based in nature.<sup>74</sup>

Materiality emerges in Merleau-Ponty's writings on painting, particularly "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind." I here use the term materiality in its relation to

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<sup>70</sup> Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13.

<sup>71</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Routledge and Kegan Paul (New York: Routledge, 2002), PDF e-book, xi.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, "Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh," in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 94, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, edited by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 67-8.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

painting—the physical qualities of paint and its relationship to the body and perception. For Merleau-Ponty, implicit in materiality, in addition to the act of painting (the ridges of paint, the wood structure and canvas), is the body of the artist since “painting uncovers the role of the body in the constitution of what [it] is.”<sup>75</sup> Cézanne, in his break with realism and Impressionism, marks this new form of embodied painting and materiality. Merleau-Ponty saw his painting as paradoxical: “he was pursuing reality without giving up the sensuous surface, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours, with no outline to enclose color, with no perspectival or pictorial arrangement.”<sup>76</sup> This was because Cézanne “did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear; he wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization.”<sup>77</sup> The act of painting then is determined to be an intertwined process of vision and movement.<sup>78</sup> Starting with the eye, the painter perceives phenomena through vision, which is recorded on the canvas, creating a new visibility, the depiction of their own lived perspective, through the gesture of the artist.<sup>79</sup> This visibility does not conform to the illusionistic space of one-point perspective and retains a fullness and density lost in the atmospheric representations of the Impressionists. Schneemann’s work, in accordance with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of materiality and Schneemann’s self-association with Cézanne, forges connections between the implications of the body of the artist, as well as the body

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<sup>75</sup> Priest, 211.

<sup>76</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 63.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, edited by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 123.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 123-4.

of the viewer in her paintings, including how these connections directly relate to the introduction of her actual body as material.

The lived perspective emphasizes the fusion of the self and world, which I relate to the relationship of the figures to the ground in Cézanne's *Bathers* (fig.8) and Schneemann's oil paintings from around the time she entered graduate school in the late 1950s. In Cézanne's *Bathers*, painted between 1902-1904, the body of water surrounding the nine figures, as discussed by Merleau-Ponty, does not follow the rules of one-point perspective. Instead of receding back into space, the water fills the entire frame, presenting a space that appears to tilt up parallel to the bathers. The figures in the center of the frame appear to sit on the surface of the water rather than being submerged, a perspective reinforced by the darker paint strokes of the water that bend around the figure rather than receding back into space. In Schneemann's 1958 *Portrait of Jane Brakhage* (fig. 9) a similar conflation of figure and ground is apparent. Like Cézanne's *Bathers* the environment behind the figure pushes out against the frame rather than receding back. This is particularly noticeable in Jane's left leg and knee where the line between the body and the environment is lost, and in her left hand where one line of orange paint stands in for two of her fingers and relates as much to the ground surrounding the figure as it does to the body.

The integration of figures into the space of the paintings, as seen in the works of Cézanne and Schneemann, can be read as a visual representation of Merleau-Ponty's fusion of self and world. As noted in Chapter One I, I relate Schneemann's landscape painting to Cézanne's practice by way of shared use of planes and treatment of paint to create a democratic space in which neither figure nor ground is privileged. In both



Cézanne's *Bathers* and Schneemann's *Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, the boundaries between body and background are not strictly defined. The bathers' appendages are mostly unarticulated, trailing off into the blue of the water. The hands and feet should appear as if they are submerged, but given the unnatural position of the bathers, particularly the figures kneeling in the water, the relationship of the bodies to the depicted space becomes confusing. Significant to this composition is the physical materiality of the paint, present through the animated gesture of the artist, as is seen with the conflation of Jane's hand with streaks of paint in Schneemann's portrait.

Cézanne and Schneemann, did not simply flatten the pictorial space through the fusion of figure and ground in their paintings, but they also imbued parts of their representations with mass and weight, and created a tactile surface. Richard Shiff describes Cézanne's painterly style and effect as follows:

“...his surfaces consist of abruptly juxtaposed strokes, each distinguished from its neighbors but linking up to establish planar continuity, with passages of color often extended across the proper boundaries of depicted objects. The net effect of Cézanne's touch is to render background areas more volumetric and foreground areas flatter than one would expect.”<sup>80</sup>

Schneemann aligned her paintings with Cézanne's and created a similar conflation of pictorial space.

In *Imaging Her Erotics*, Schneemann links the body to perception in painting, stating, “with Cézanne, I studied [how] the picture plane fractured into phrases of larger rhythms, contributing details; the body has to enter perception viscerally: each stroke is an event in pictorial space.”<sup>81</sup> Both Merleau-Ponty and Schneemann emphasize the lack of a fixed perspective in painting, and relate the body to the materiality of paint.

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Shiff, “Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch,” in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 140.

<sup>81</sup> Haug, 24.

Returning to Shiff, in his essay, he highlights three ways in which touch figures into painting: the gesture of the artist, the actual paint mark applied to the surface, and the “tactile sensation the painter actually experiences or the viewer images to be associated with making such a mark.”<sup>82</sup> As stated previously, for Merleau-Ponty the body emphasized through touch is the painter’s. For Schneemann, in addition to the painter’s body, the material body of the viewer is activated by responding to the areas of color and texture in the work. This links the materiality and tactility of the paint to what she terms the energy of the work. Schneemann states:

The energy implicit in an area of paint (or cloth, paper, wood, glass...) is defined in terms of the time which it takes for the eye to journey through the implicit motion and direction of this area. The eye follows the building of forms...no matter what materials are used to establish the forms...The tactile activity of the paint itself prepares us for the increased dimensionality of collage and construction: the literal dimensionality of paint seen close-on as raised surface...as a geology of lumps, ridges, lines and seams. Ambiguous by-plays of dimension-in-action open our eyes to the metaphorical life of materials themselves.<sup>83</sup>

Returning to Cézanne’s *Bathers* and Schneemann’s *Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, the body of the viewer is activated through the eye as it follows the gestural marks of the painter. The breakdown of accurate perspective allows the eye of the viewer to see beyond the “figures” and to read of the work as pure form—as gestures and ridges of paint. The breakdown of illusionistic space allows for a phenomenological reading of the work in relation to the body, whether that of the painter or the viewer, by association with the materiality of paint. This reading requires a consideration of the body, which Mark Wrathall and Joseph Parry reiterate in their book, *Art and Phenomenology*, writing, “in

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<sup>82</sup> Shiff, 134.

<sup>83</sup> *More Than Meat Joy* MS 1 of 2, 1963, 950001, series I, box 6, folder 3, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

phenomenology we want to understand the thing, the work itself; we, for instance, want to “do phenomenology” by studying artworks very carefully as phenomena, as things of physical substance that we encounter not only because we have bodies, but also in our bodies.”<sup>84</sup> Wrathall and Parry link the consideration of the body to the theories of Merleau-Ponty since, “for Merleau-Ponty, our facticity cannot be understood apart from an understanding of our bodies...For phenomenology insists that my consciousness—my awareness of myself, others, objects, all of the things that make up my world—is rooted in my body.”<sup>85</sup> A phenomenological reading of painting thus requires a consideration of vision and movement, which I will link to considerations of the eye and body in Schneemann’s practice.

In Schneemann’s previous quote about the energy implicit in paint, she highlights how considerations of the materiality of the paint led her to the creation of assemblages and constructions, and to the inclusion of various materials in her work. During her time as a graduate student at the University of Illinois, Schneemann was concerned with activating the picture plane beyond the flat, rectangular space of the canvas. Her 1960 report on her thesis painting, *Concretion II*, thoroughly describes the materials and processes she used to do this. Throughout the writing is a concern with the materiality of the paint and its connection to the body. Schneemann applied paint with brushes, palette knives, and the tube of paint itself, the employment of which she describes as “an extension of the hand like a pencil or brush.”<sup>86</sup> In terms of the title *Concretion II*, concretion should be understood in relationship to concrete, solid forms with mass, as

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<sup>84</sup> Joseph D. Parry and Mark Wrathall, Introduction to *Art and Phenomenology*, edited by Joseph D. Parry (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “A Report on a Thesis Painting entitled “Concretions II,” 1963, 950001, series III, box 27, folder 2, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

seen in Schneemann's introduction of cloth, crayons, paper, steel tacks and egg shells to the canvas.<sup>87</sup> In certain areas, Schneemann crumpled and adhered paper to the canvas to provide an "added dimensionality of texture and a relief-like surface."<sup>88</sup> The activation of the picture plane in *Concretion II* through the treatment of the canvas moves beyond Cézanne's "sculptural" depiction of pictorial space to a more literal one. It is Schneemann's move from a metaphorical fusion of self and world in her paintings, due to a literal fusion of self and world occurs when her works break out of the picture plane, that later allows her to include her body as material.

Schneemann also understood concretion in relationship to gesture, stating, "the fundamental life of any material I use is concretized in that material's gesture: gesticulation, gestation—a source of compression (measure of tension and expansion), resistance—developing force of visual action. Manifest in space, any particular gesture acts on the eye as a unit of time."<sup>89</sup> It is gesture that makes the introduction of other materials in her concretions possible. Schneemann writes:

My concretions provide for an intensification of all faculties simultaneously—apprehensions are called forth in wild juxtaposition. My eye creates, searches out expressive form in the materials I choose; such form corresponds to a visual-kinesthetic dimensionality; a visceral necessity drawn by the senses to the finger of eye...a mobile, tactile event into which the eye leads the body; a picture plane as dimensional as dream is, or landscape. Perspective is the over-all immediacy in which each area partakes of every parameter open to it. Horizontals, verticals, pressure, torsion, pulse and color move to sustain an image as a habitation.<sup>90</sup>

*Tenebration*, (fig. 10) created shortly after *Concretions II*, illustrates many of the techniques and materials documented in Schneemann's thesis report, and shows

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 12.

Schneemann's considerations of landscape and abstraction, in addition to prefacing her creation of painting-constructions. *Tenebration* contains similar expressive markings as *Landscape* (fig. 6), but since Schneemann utilized the paint tube as an applicator certain areas have thicker paint, a technique known as impasto. Adding to the relief is Schneemann's inclusion of paper and wire mesh, glued to the canvas. Schneemann both collaged flat pieces of paper containing photographic images and added larger pieces of paper, adhered in a way that reveals their wrinkles and ridges.

At the same time Schneemann was activating the picture plane in the *Concretions*, she created her first performance, *Labyrinths* (1960). *Labyrinths* was inspired by a 1960 tornado that uprooted a tree which fell onto the roof of Schneemann's house in Sidney, Illinois, a story she recounts in *More Than Meat Joy*.<sup>91</sup> Because of the destruction, Schneemann's cat, Kitch, was able to climb out the kitchen window, walk down the tree and enter the landscape. Kitch's journey was a major inspiration for Schneemann who wrote, "that is how and why I decided to use the fallen tree and flooded-out rock walls, the mud and broken branches, as an 'environment'—a labyrinth—for a group of friends to proceed through one Sunday afternoon."<sup>92</sup> Schneemann's creation of *Labyrinths* relates to her interest in breaking down the picture plane, which she was simultaneously addressing in her painting-constructions. In regards to *Labyrinths*, Schneemann wrote:

I sit in my small cluttered square room, surrounded by the fixed rectangular shapes of books, paintings, drawings, collages; the work table, the doorway, the long rectangular window. I've painted canvases of the landscape out this window. I've taken snapshots out the window. Now observing the random passage of friends through the familiar landscape framed by the window, I imagine they have become the extension of my

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

eye and arm—are strokes of color, moving gesture and event on a canvas—paradoxically an image and the process of imagery being created temporally.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the physical destruction caused by the tornado, the “moving gesture” and “events on canvas” led Schneemann to create her first performance, but she did not give up her practice in painting.

After completing her graduate degree in 1960, Schneemann moved to New York City and continued producing painting-constructions. In *Sir Henry Francis Taylor* (fig. 11), Schneemann abandoned the canvas and instead chose Masonite board for the construction. As a continuation of the expanded range of materials in *Concretions II* and *Tenebrations*, *Sir Henry Francis Taylor* includes paint, collaged magazine images, paper, and wire mesh. The surface is built up, with the right side dominated by a rectangular wood shelf on which rests a three-dimensional, cylindrical form made of wire and plaster and a draped pair of underwear from James Tenney, Schneemann’s husband at the time. On the left side Schneemann cut into the picture plane in a shape reminiscent of the outline of the state of Illinois, where Schneemann first began to make her painting-constructions. Schneemann’s interest in activating the picture plane led her to both cut into her work and project outward into the viewer’s space. Schneemann continued the progression inwards and outwards in two other works from this period, *Four Fur Cutting Boards* (fig. 12) and *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (fig. 1). In addition to the activation of the picture plane, the physical (human) scale of *Four Fur Cutting Boards* and the inclusion of her body in *Eye Body* allowed Schneemann to further her presentation of a lived perspective, with her body as material.

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<sup>93</sup> Labyrinths, 1963, 950001, series I, box 1, folder 1, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California .

In 1963, Schneemann created a large-scale painting-construction titled *Four Fur Cutting Boards* in which she incorporated found materials from her loft in New York City. Schneemann had taken residence in an old building on 29<sup>th</sup> Street, which had previously been a fur cutters' loft.<sup>94</sup> As the title suggests, the basic form of the work featured four fur cutting boards left by the previous owners, attached to each other and standing upright. The boards, given their size of over six feet tall, relate to the physical scale of the body. Various materials were collaged to the surface of the boards, including mirrors, glass, lights and umbrellas, all of which were then painted.<sup>95</sup> In previous paintings created by Schneemann, such as *Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, references to the body resulted not only from the figure represented but from the materiality of the paint, the physical gesture of the artist and the activation of the eye in the viewer's response. The phenomenological connection of *Four Fur Cutting Boards* is strengthened not only by the inclusion of materials other than paint, but also because of the inclusion of motorized parts that not only projected out forward into space, but move. *Four Fur Cutting Boards*, with its relation to the body through its physical scale and its movement, provided the basis for Schneemann's next major work, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions*.

With *Eye Body*, Schneemann pushed the illusion of depth beyond what was possible in her painting-construction work, stretching the picture space out into her own studio environment, unveiling the site of her artistic production. Schneemann's entire studio loft became part of the work, a set of "performative actions" for the photographer

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<sup>94</sup> Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt, "Carolee Schneemann: Feminine Erotics," in *In Her Own Image: Women's Self-Representation in Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Danielle Knafo (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing, 2009), 90.

<sup>95</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 52.

Erró, who recorded the event.<sup>96</sup> *Four Fur Cutting Boards* figured prominently, as did other finished and in progress painting-constructions: *Gift Science*, *Music Box Music*, *Ice Box*, *Glass Hat Stands*, *December Remembered*, *Maximus at Gloucester*, *Fire Lights*, *Fur Landscape*, and *Colorado House*.<sup>97</sup> For *Eye Body* Schneemann covered herself with materials that had appeared in her other works: fur, paint, paper, and transparent plastic, materials that have had a continued presence throughout her entire oeuvre. Schneemann thus placed her “painted” body within and around the painting-constructions in her studio.<sup>98</sup>

Kristen Stiles addresses the implications of the title, *Eye Body*, in her essay “The Painter as an Instrument for Real Time.” For Stiles, *Eye Body* refers to two different eyes: “the bodily eye (which dominates over actual things) and the body-as-eye (which thinks its dominion in the mind).”<sup>99</sup> Stiles sees in *Eye Body* the successful merging of three different spaces: “the picture space, the picture maker’s space (namely, her own studio environment), and the viewer’s space.”<sup>100</sup> She attributes the success of Schneemann’s merging of “the bodily eye” and the “body-as-eye” to the democratic use of heavy over-painting on Schneemann’s body and the assemblage pieces that are present.<sup>101</sup> It’s the materiality, the tactility of the paint, in its reference back to the body and literal attachment to the body that makes the merging successful.

What should not be ignored within Schneemann’s title, *Eye Body* is the similarity to Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Eye and Mind.” Both give the eye and vision priority, by

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<sup>96</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 55.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>99</sup> Stiles, “The Painter As Instrument,” 4-5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.



placing ‘eye’ first in their configurations.<sup>102</sup> In “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty theorizes a “system of exchanges between body and world” in which eye and hand are the counterpoint, similar to Stiles’ “bodily eye” and “body-as-eye.”<sup>103</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, who focused solely on paintings in his writings on Aesthetics, the eye is primary, and it is from the eye to the mind and then the gesture of the hand that the lived perspective is translated to the canvas.

Merleau-Ponty theorizes that through the exchanges between body, eye, and hand, an overlapping occurs in which “the seer and the seen are capable of reversing their roles as subject and object.”<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, in her book *Volatile Bodies*, clarifies the reversibility of the subject/object positions in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, stating that in this configuration the body functions as “object (for others) and a lived reality (for the subject).”<sup>105</sup> The body is here defined by its relation to objects, and objects are defined in their relationship to the body.<sup>106</sup> In *Eye Body*, Schneemann equates her body with the objects around her by covering herself with paint, grease and transparent plastic—the same materials she used on the assemblages that surrounded her. In *More Than Meat Joy*, Schneemann writes of the integration of her body as an artistic material in *Eye Body*, discussing the principle of embodiment and “the extension of the self as a material.”<sup>107</sup> She continues, “I established my body as visual territory. Not only am I an image maker, but I explore the image values of flesh as material I choose to work

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<sup>102</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 261.

<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 47; Stiles, “The Painter As Instrument,” 4-5.

<sup>104</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 47.

<sup>105</sup> Grosz, 87.

<sup>107</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 52.

with.”<sup>108</sup> This statement regarding her role as image and image maker, using flesh as material, is one that is often quoted in regards to her entire artistic practice, particularly in feminist readings of her work. Schneemann, in the use of her body, set a precedent for subsequent body artists and for feminist art production generally. But situating her work only in these terms denies her training as a painter and the significance of her extension of the visible properties of painting into space. Indeed, in this same frequently quoted passage, Schneemann addresses this one-sided understanding of *Eye Body*, stating that in the work she used her body as an extension of her painting-constructions, but that her effort to “obliterate the self and to turn the self into a collage—was not understood.”<sup>109</sup> But by reading *Eye Body* through Merleau-Ponty’s fusion of self and world and the reversibility of subject/object positions, Schneemann’s extension of herself as material, as collage, can be viewed as successful. These theories also take on significance in Schneemann’s use of movement and feminist readings of *Eye Body*.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3: MOTION

In Chapter Two I showed how *Eye Body* represented a significant turning point in Schneemann's work, marking the first inclusion of her body as material in her art, and linking the materiality of the body to the materiality of paint. Schneemann's introduction of her body as material also stemmed from her understanding of gesture as event. It was the extension of movement inherent in gesture—the movement of the artist's body in the creation and the movement of the viewer's eye in the reception of the work—that made the body feasible material for Schneemann. In her own words, “the moving body in space/as an extension of the eye-to-hand gesture behind (producing) the paint-stroke (formal unit),” continuing, “the fluid, actually present environment (of theater) as an extension of the relatively fixed visual environments—both selected/external and imaged inner-eye—(of painting).”<sup>110</sup> The element of movement is lost in the still photographs documenting *Eye Body*, but is alluded to in the full title of the work, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions*. The integration of movement was not in contrast to her earlier paintings, but rather suggests a progression from the implied movement of the artist's and viewer's body through the gestural marks of her earlier paintings, the motorized parts of her later works, to the “performative actions” with, in front of, and around her painting-constructions in *Eye Body*. It was through her painterly understanding of gesture that Schneemann introduced performance alongside her painting process.

Schneemann's body in movement was also integral to her breakdown of the subject/object dichotomy presumed by traditional painting. *Eye Body* was the turning

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<sup>110</sup> Correspondence, 1965, 950001, series III, box 27, folder 4, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

point where Schneemann posed the questions: “could I include myself as a formal aspect of my own materials? Could a nude woman artist be both image and image maker?”<sup>111</sup> By contrast, in Schneemann’s 1964 performance with Robert Morris, *Site* (fig. 13), Morris appeared on stage with a white plywood structure that he dismantled, piece by piece, until finally revealing Schneemann reclining nude on a “couch” of plywood. Schneemann thus appeared as an updated version of Victorine Meurent in Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), wearing a similar black choker and reclining in the same position. After her unveiling Schneemann did not move; instead Morris manipulated the plywood, balancing and moving the pieces around the stage, and then reassembling the structure so Schneemann was once again concealed.<sup>112</sup>

Schneemann has cited her interest in feminism and representations of the female body as her reasons for participating in *Site*, stating in an interview with Kate Haug: “I had to get that nude off the canvas.”<sup>113</sup> For Morris, *Site* was also about the “dismemberment of the picture plane.”<sup>114</sup> The title suggests a “pun on Modernist pictorial conventions,” and by presenting a “real” Olympia in “flesh and blood,” Morris sought a “refusal of the interiority of painting.”<sup>115</sup>

Additionally, Schneemann’s background as an artist’s model led directly to the creation of *Eye Body* and had implications for *Site*. In the same interview she recalls:

When I first came to New York, I was supporting myself as an artist’s model. I was lying naked listening to these terrible men, most of them really ruining their students’ drawings...Then I come back to the studio

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<sup>111</sup>Haug, 30.

<sup>112</sup>Burt, 64.

<sup>113</sup>Haug, 30.

<sup>114</sup>Kimberly Paice, “Site, 1964” in *Robert Morris The Mind/Body Problem* ed. Anthony Calnek (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 168.

<sup>115</sup>Rosalind Krauss, “The Mind/Body Problem: Robert Morris in Series,” in *Robert Morris The Mind/Body Problem* ed. Anthony Calnek (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 6.

where the cultural message was, “you’re incredible, but don’t really try to do anything.” I would just pick up my hammer and start fracturing my materials with a full arm swing and focused aim. My work was about motion and momentum and physicality. The next step was to see what would happen if the body went in among my own materials.”<sup>116</sup>

Schneemann found the negative cultural responses to be because of her position as a female. She has spoken about an early, upsetting studio visit with the art historian Leo Steinberg, and said she was constantly told her work was impossible, not good, not right, too masculine, too feminine.<sup>117</sup> In reaction, Schneemann turned to her body as material:

The body main remain erotic, sexual, desired, desiring, but it is as well votive: marked, written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by my creative female will...I write my creative female will because for years my most audacious works were viewed as if someone else inhabiting me had created them. They were considered “masculine” when seen as aggressive, bold. As if I were inhabited by a stray male principle; which would be an interesting possibility—except in the early sixties this notion was used to blot out, denigrate, deflect the coherence, necessity and personal integrity of what I made and how it was made.<sup>118</sup>

Both performances may have stemmed from similar ideas in regards to the integration of the “real” female body into art’s terrain of the ideal, but Schneemann, who was immobilized in *Site*, was still denied the ability to function as subject and object. Ted Castle, in discussing *Site*, states, “this was not typical Schneemann work, it was the first time she appeared in public entirely naked, except in her own loft. She was permitting her body to be used she was not quite using it herself.”<sup>119</sup> Similarly, Schneemann has

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<sup>116</sup> Haug, 30.

<sup>117</sup> Carolee Schneemann, Interview by Regina Flowers. Phone interview. February 13, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> “Eye Body,” 950001, series I, box 6, folder 6, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994. Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>119</sup> Ted Castle, “The Woman Who Uses Her Body For Art,” *ArtForum* 19, no. 80 (1980): 66-67.

commented that she felt immobilized by the male gaze, while participating in *Site* unable to move and positioned for the viewing pleasure of others'.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to being symbolically immobilized by the male gaze, Schneemann was legally restricted to the frozen role of artistic object in *Site*. In *The Object of Performance*, Henry Sayre describes how Schneemann was required to be immobile if she was to appear naked on stage. He quotes Schneemann directly, “the law at this time stated that persons could appear on stage naked without moving—that is, if they became statues. Movement or physical contact between nude persons was criminal.”<sup>121</sup> Performed in her loft and not on stage, this law did not affect *Eye Body* like *Site*, but it was a problem in her next major work, *Meat Joy*.

Since she was unable to move on stage in *Site*, Schneemann became solely an object, a sort of commodification, an idea furthered by the fact that when the work was re-performed in Philadelphia, Schneemann was replaced by another woman, reinforcing her lack of subjectivity in the piece.<sup>122</sup> In relation to the advancements Schneemann had made with *Eye Body*, acting as subject and object, *Site* was a setback. However, her participation in *Site* was a catalyst for the increased importance of movement in her later works of the 1960s where she continued to dismantle the subject/object dichotomy.

Schneemann continued to use her moving body to link the breakdown of mind/body dualism to the breakdown of the subject/object distinction. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty found bodily movement integral to the mind/body split, understanding movement as revealing the union of the mind and body and the fusion of the self with the world, writing, “My moving body makes a difference in the visible world, being a part of

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<sup>120</sup> Haug, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Sayre, 76.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 70.

it...the visible world and the world of my motor project are both total parts of the same Being.”<sup>123</sup> This reversibility, where one is both subject and object, a fusion of self and world, is defined by Merleau-Ponty as “flesh” and is further explored in “Eye and Mind:”

Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body.<sup>124</sup>

Though not talking specifically about art in this statement, instead talking about the interrelation of bodies in the environment in a broader sense, it nevertheless applies to how Schneemann conceived of painting in the 1960s. In a 1964 letter to the Walter Gutman Foundation, Schneemann writes:

I am a painter and during the past five years I have created Environments, Events and theatre works for dancers. While my painting moved to collage and construction, an insistent imagery of extended dimensionality in space and time of visual-kinesthetic action leads me to make environments.<sup>125</sup>

Here Schneemann links bodily movement to a consideration of space and time, and to her inclusion of performative works with her process of painting. The year of the letter is significant; 1964 is when Schneemann participated in *Site*, performed *Meat Joy* and began *Fuses*. *Meat Joy* and *Fuses* are the other two works that deserve consideration in terms of their integration of movement and erotic imagery.

Schneemann acknowledges the importance of movement to her performative works by changing the terminology describing these works. In her letter to the Walter Gutman Foundation she refers to her performative works as “Environments, Events and

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<sup>123</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 124.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>125</sup> Letter to Abraham Spilky, Secretary of the Walter Gutman Foundation, 1964, 950001, series I, box I, folder 8, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

theatre works.”<sup>126</sup> In her personal notebooks she uses the terms “visual dramas” and “concretions.”<sup>127</sup> By the time Schneemann published *More Than Meat Joy* in 1979, she was referring to her Happenings as Kinetic Theater, emphasizing the role movement plays in her art. Again, the relationship to painting is essential, as noted in Schneemann’s definition of Kinetic Theater:

...my particular development of the “Happening.” It is exactly my lack of experience with traditional theater that left me free to evolve a new theatrical form. I am a painter, which means that even though I may not be working with paint on canvas, my sensibility is shaped in visual worlds and these are strongly tactile, plastic, dimensional.<sup>128</sup>

This definition comes from her preparatory notes for her publication *More Than Meat Joy*, and is immediately followed by a list of factors that she cites as leading to her transition from painting to performance, including: the plenitude of materials available for Kinetic Theater, the mobile body in space (as an extension of the painted gesture), and the fluid environment (as an extension of the fixed space in painting).<sup>129</sup> The presence of material and motion in Schneemann’s painting led to their presence in her Kinetic Theater. Alongside her development of Kinetic Theater, Schneemann began her first film *Fuses* (1964-7), which can be read as documenting her shift from traditional painting to her inclusion of performance. In a letter to critic Gene Youngblood about *Fuses*, Schneemann wrote, “one of the awesome aspects of film as [a] thing-in-itself after adjusting, [is] welcoming the loss of the object...and accepting the immediate passage of

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<sup>126</sup> Letter to Abraham Spikly, Secretary of the Walter Gutman Foundation, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>127</sup> Previous phrases used by Schneemann in reference to these works include visual dramas and concretions and can be found in her publication *More Than Meat Joy* (New Paltz: Documentext, 1979) and throughout her archive, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, at the Getty Research Institute.

<sup>128</sup> *More Than Meat Joy* Notes, 1979, 950001, series I, box 8, folder 4, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>129</sup> *More Than Meat Joy* Notes, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.



image in live performance.”<sup>130</sup> For Schneemann film navigates the space between painting and performance: film does not function as an object, given its temporality, but also lacks the immediacy of a live performance.

*Fuses* was first shown as a work in progress in her New York City studio in 1965 for an audience of fellow artists.<sup>131</sup> *Fuses* is related to *Meat Joy* and Schneemann’s other Kinetic Theater works by way of their shared interest in movement, but they are distinguished by the work’s different relationship to the viewers. The mechanisms of film’s relationship to viewers can be understood through Schneemann’s discussion of the difference between the reception of her painting-constructions and her performative works. Schneemann describes the audience for her painting as more passive, stating:

The force of a performance is necessarily more aggressive and immediate in its effect—it is projective... The steady exploration and repeated viewing which the eye is required to make with my painting-constructions is reversed in the performance situation where the spectator is overwhelmed with changing recognitions, carried emotionally by a flux of evocative actions.<sup>132</sup>

The more passive audience of the painting-construction works is countered by the more interactive audience for the Kinetic Theater works:

During a theater piece the audience may become more active physically than when viewing a painting or assemblage; their physical reactions will tend to manifest actual scale—relating to motions, mobilities the body does make in a specific environment. They may have to act, to do things, to assist in some activity, to get out of the way, to dodge or catch falling objects.<sup>133</sup>

Film, in terms of the viewer’s reaction, occupies a space between Schneemann’s understanding of the more passive audience for painting-constructions and the more

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<sup>130</sup> *Fuses* Correspondence, 950001, series III, box 28, folder 1, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>131</sup> Haug, 26.

<sup>132</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 10.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

active audience of performative works. Film is marked by “changing recognitions;” the film image is not singular, it’s always in movement. Yet the audience cannot engage physically like they can with the Kinetic Theater works, as the film image is only a representation of previous events.

*Fuses*, as Schneemann describes it, is a painter’s film.<sup>134</sup> In the film, Schneemann depicts the physical act of her and her husband at the time, James Tenney, having sex. She combines images of them performing a variety of sexual acts, as well as images of their cat, Kitch, and images of them in nature. Schneemann evokes the emotional and psychological side of the sexual act by representing it as a visual and tactile experience through the formal alteration of the film-strip. She intentionally obscured the film-strips to produce distortions in the colors and the visual images, thus adding a heightened psychological dimension to the work. Schneemann collaged, scratched, baked and painted directly onto the film-strip. Schneemann approached the film in the same way she approached her paintings: as a surface she could act upon. Schneemann states:

In the midst of developing my Kinetic Theater works, I began an erotic film, *Fuses*, really because no one else had dealt with the images of love-making as a core of spontaneous gesture and movement...There was no aspect of lovemaking which I would avoid; as a painter I had never accepted that any part of the body be subject to visual or tactile taboos. And as a painter I was free to examine the celluloid itself: burning, baking, cutting, painting, dipping my footage in acid, building dense layers of collage & complex a & b rolls held together with paper clips.<sup>135</sup>

In *Fuses*, movement is highlighted through gesture, which Schneemann refers to in the above quote, noting the connectedness of material through gesture and motion. When

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<sup>134</sup> Carolee Schneemann, “CS to Kerry Brouher,” in *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann*, ed. Kristine Stiles (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 450.

<sup>135</sup> Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter, 950001, series I, box 3, folder 9, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

projected, the painted marks on the filmstrip, in combination with the editing, reveal the structure of the filmstrip, a break with illusionistic space similar to Schneemann's breakdown of the picture plane in her painting and painting-constructions. The imagery flickers back and forth, from a dark screen to Schneemann and Tenney having sex to a white screen and shots filled with painted marks. The body is marked with paint. With the integration of Schneemann's physical body into her work, this relationship is not just implied, but reinforced in the imagery through a projection of her physical body. *Fuses* makes explicit the previously latent connection between the erotic (given the presence of Schneemann's marked body) and her body in motion.

The making of *Fuses* was a direct response by Schneemann to the films of Stan Brakhage. Schneemann met Brakhage through James Tenney, and both Schneemann and Tenney appeared in two of Brakhage's films, *Loving* (1957) and *Cat's Cradle* (1959). Both films included sexual encounters between Schneemann and Tenney, but the representation of female sexuality in each was an issue for Schneemann. She states that she and Brakhage "endlessly argued over Stan's concept of 'use.' I felt 'used' because I was not freely, fully myself in *Loving* and *Cat's Cradle*, because central energies of Jim's and my life together were fragmented or diverted from the image."<sup>136</sup> Brakhage's best-known film, *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), was made from footage of the birth of his first child with his wife Jane. What Schneemann objected to was that Brakhage took the biologically female act of childbirth and made it an extension of his own vision

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<sup>136</sup> Kristine Siles, *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 287. Schneemann explores this idea of use in terms of her relation to Brakhage in "Meyersville," December 6, 1963, 950001, series III, box 27, folder 2, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

through the camera, thereby removing the female perspective.<sup>137</sup> In *Window Water Baby Moving*, Brakhage obscured the images of his wife Jane. Equal attention was given to images of Jane and Stan Brakhage, the birthing act and reflections of light from the window. In contrast, in Schneemann's *Portrait of Jane Brakhage* (fig. 9) emphasis is placed solely on Jane. Schneemann placed her centrally in the composition, and her body language exudes confidence, with arms away from her sides and her legs apart. Most significant is the position of her eyes, staring straight out, meeting the gaze of the viewer.

Schneemann viewed the representation of the birth in *Window Water Baby Moving* as a form of "masculine appropriation."<sup>138</sup> In response she created *Fuses*, a portrayal of the sexual act that must precede a birth scene such as the one in Brakhage's film, and a portrayal that does not privilege one partner over the other. By showing the erotic from her own perspective Schneemann created a sense of equality for both her and Tenney, an equality that Schneemann did not find in any of Brakhage's films, or in her experience in *Site* with Robert Morris.

Schneemann's depiction of the emotional and psychological aspects of sexual intercourse in *Fuses* was part of her larger goal of creating a film with a sex positive portrayal of female sexual desire. Here sex positive means a representation that promotes sexual desire and experimentation that is reciprocal and respectful.<sup>139</sup> Schneemann achieved a sex positive portrayal through her position as active creator, as she used her body and Tenney's to create meaning in the same ways and present the sexual pleasure of both partners. The montaging of the film that fuses together the images of Tenney and

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<sup>137</sup> Haug, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Pamela M. Lee, "Bare Lives," in *X-Screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s* (Koln: Wather Konig, 2004): 74.

<sup>139</sup> Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 98.

Schneemann supports this claim. Using the classical film technique of shot/countershot, Schneemann provides the viewer with images of Tenney's erect penis, immediately followed by images of Schneemann's vagina. Schneemann created a temporal relationship between the sexes and aligned the point of view of the camera with both bodies in order to deny any suggestion of a hierarchy. When the camera panned over Schneemann's reclining, naked body, it then did the same to Tenney's. Both partners took turns filming, as well as giving and receiving pleasure. The erotic is produced through the materiality of the filmstrip and the gestures, combined with the movement of the figures recorded on the film and the way in which the film was edited. Concurrent with the making of *Fuses*, Schneemann created *Meat Joy*, a Kinetic Theater work often compared to *Fuses* due to a shared Dionysian presentation of sexuality.<sup>140</sup>

*Meat Joy*, Schneemann's first full scale Kinetic Theater work, was initially performed for the *Festival de La Libre Expression* in May 1964, in Paris, and repeated six months later at the Judson Memorial Church in New York City.<sup>141</sup> Derived from dream images, *Meat Joy* is, as Schneemann describes, "an erotic ritual—excessive, indulgent, a celebration of flesh as material."<sup>142</sup> Schneemann covered herself, as well as the bodies of others, with many of the same materials that she employed in *Eye Body*, including paint, plastic, and rope, but with *Meat Joy* she also included raw fish, chicken and sausages. As in her paintings and assemblages, Schneemann equated the materials used with the body of the artist, furthering what she started with *Eye Body*. The bodies of

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<sup>140</sup> David Levi Strauss, "Love Rides Aristotle Through the Audience: Body, Image, and Idea in the Work of Carolee Schneemann," in *Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 321.

<sup>141</sup> Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, 63.

<sup>142</sup> Hedges and Wendt, 93.

the performers function as the surface on and through which the work was created; the body is integral to the creation and meaning of the work.

Movement is an essential component of *Meat Joy*, even more so than in *Fuses*, given the inclusion of multiple performers. The physical movement of the performers structured the performance—they walked, ran, rolled, and gestured with their arms and legs. They interacted as pairs and came together as a group to move in unison. Because of their movement, the performers were not allowed to be naked, and instead were outfitted in nude colored bikinis. The activity of *Meat Joy* was in deliberate contrast to how Schneemann, on stage in *Site*, was passively confined to her plywood bench.

Schneemann is explicit about why she uses her body in her work, stating:

In the early sixties I felt quite alone in my insistence on the integrity of my own sexuality and creativity. There were many reasons for my use of the naked body in my Kinetic Theater works (my development of “the happening”): to break into the taboos against the vitality of the naked body in movement, to eroticise [sic] my guilt ridden culture and further to confound this culture’s sexual rigidities—that the life of the body is more variously expressive than a sex-negative society can admit.<sup>143</sup>

*Meat Joy* and *Fuses*, both in context and location, dictates how the female body can be represented—the image of the nude female form is acceptable if created by the male artist, the actual body in motion is not. In her article, “The Obscene Body/Politic,” Schneemann describes the censorship of *Meat Joy*: “I had intended the performers to be nude; the moral-decency rules in France at that time stipulated that naked male and female performers were subject to arrest *if they moved*; they could remain in the frozen position of statues without breaking the law,” a law like the one that required

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<sup>143</sup>Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter, 950001, series I, box 3, folder 9, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

Schneemann to be immobile in *Site* in the United States.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, *Fuses* had its own censorship battles.<sup>145</sup> In the “Obscene Body/Politic,” Schneemann addresses a significant factor in the production of these performative events and their production and censorship-economics, writing:

It is also important to remember that there were no funding sources for performance art in the 1960s; the term, the concept, did not exist. There were wild, crazy Happenings, Fluxus, and Events—all produced with available trash, found objects, and willing collaborators. If we had then been applying to government agencies to support us, would forms of self-censorship have restricted our use of degraded materials or impinged upon our considered disregard for the comfort of the audience?<sup>146</sup>

When Schneemann was invited by Jean-Jacques Lebel to create a Happening for the “Festival of Free Expression,” in Paris, she was not even offered funding to make the trip across the Atlantic.<sup>147</sup> The Judson Dance Group was not profitable either. The audience admission was by contributions only and the money was used for mailings, equipment and upkeep.<sup>148</sup> Schneemann often took on teaching jobs to support herself, and would find imaginative ways to fund her projects. For *Meat Joy* she wrote to the company Hollywood Vassarette seeking bra donations for the women performers to wear.<sup>149</sup>

All the works discussed thus far link the materiality of paint and body. The paintings are linked through gesture, and the performative works, both *Eye Body* and

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<sup>144</sup> Carolee Schneemann, “The Obscene Body/Politic,” *Art Journal* 50, no.4 (Winter 1991): 29.

<sup>145</sup> See Schneemann, “The Obscene Body/Politic,” in which she describes her film being censored at the 1989 Moscow Film Festival, violent reactions at the Cannes Film Festival and the projection operator being arrested while the film still rolled during a showing of *Fuses*.

<sup>146</sup> Schneemann, “The Obscene Body/Politic,” 31.

<sup>147</sup> “Notes,” 950001, series I, box 8, folder 3, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994. Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>148</sup> “Meat Joy,” 1964, 950001, series I, box 1, folder 8, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994. Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>149</sup> Correspondence with Miss Santacreu, 1964, 950001, series I, box 1, folder 8, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994. Getty Research Institute, California.

*Meat Joy*, through an application of paint to the body. Given the relationship of paint with flesh, and Schneemann's first performance of *Meat Joy* in Paris in 1964, connections with, or reactions to, Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* can be made. In these works Klein used models as "living brushes," also termed "flesh brushes."<sup>150</sup> Covered in blue paint, Klein directed the models to create marks on large sheets of paper he would roll out on the floor. In his best-known work of this series, on March 9, 1960, Klein invited art patrons to an upscale art gallery to witness the creation of one of his *Anthropometries*.<sup>151</sup> The audience were directed to gilded chairs, and watched as Yves Klein, dressed in a full tuxedo directed the nude women in the creation of the work, while accompanied by the music ensemble including violins and cellos.<sup>152</sup> Acting as "living paintbrushes," Klein's models functioned as objects for the male artist in the creation of the work, a creation that Schneemann was reacting against, using her own body to function as object and subject.

In *Meat Joy*, when the performers handled the chicken, fish and sausages, the flesh of the raw meat is equated with the flesh of the body as another way to reference the erotic. Schneemann conceived of *Meat Joy* as an inundation of the senses, stating, "performance allows me involvement with changing metaphors, including every possibility of sensory ambiguity: the transference of aural to tactile, taste to feel, gesture s to taste, shape to gesture: an intensification of sensory information."<sup>153</sup> It is the audience's senses that are inundated by the performance. In terms of audience reaction, Schneemann has stated her intention to "open them up, to flood them with possibilities, to

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<sup>150</sup> Schimmel, 33.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> *More Than Meat Joy* Notes, 1979, 950001, series I, box 8, folder 3, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.



provoke them, to upset them, to disturb them, and to give them a dose of confirmation for who they feel they might want to be.”<sup>154</sup> Schneemann has been successful in provoking and disturbing her audience, to a point where she has been put in danger. In the middle of the Paris performance of *Meat Joy*, a man jumped out of the audience and began to strangle her. She discusses this incident in her 1974 essay, “Istory of a Girl Pornography,” writing:

I understood I had affected him, but not how to break his hold on my neck! And I was terrified that the audience closest to us would think it was part of the performance. No one made a move. Even if I could have squawked, the din of the continuing performance was overwhelming. I was saved by three middle-aged women, who had no previous experience of the avant-garde; they simply felt I was being assaulted apart from the often violent performance. They threw themselves as one onto the man and dragged him off me.<sup>155</sup>

A level of engagement with the audience, one that induced violence, was not anticipated by Schneemann. There was an inherent distance between work and viewer in her previous paintings that was lost when Schneemann moved into Kinetic Theater, where she performed in close range to the audience.

Describing the dream images that formed the basis for *Meat Joy*, Schneemann says they were “visceral dreams of expanding physical energy—off the canvas, out of the frame.”<sup>156</sup> Schneemann’s concern with expanding the frame was additionally supported by the presence of the audience and provided another way to integrate her body into the environment, a concern she addressed from the start in her painting practice, and one related to an engagement with the senses. As she said, “I am after the interpenetrations and displacements which occur between various sense stimuli; the interaction and

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<sup>154</sup>More Than Meat Joy Interviews, 1979, 950001, series I, box 7, folder 8, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>155</sup>Schneemann, *Imaging*, 138.

<sup>156</sup>Hedges and Wendt, 93.

exchange between body and the environment outside it; the body as environment.”<sup>157</sup> The body in relationship to the environment, the “being-in-the-world,” or expression of the lived perspective, is present in Schneemann’s entire body of work, from the lack of a definitive boundary between figure and ground in paintings, such as *Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, to the inclusion of found materials in her painting-constructions and the use of her body as material in *Eye Body*, *Fuses* and *Meat Joy*.

The materials Schneemann chose to work with span her practices in painting and performance. For her they serve the same goal: “my eye creates, searches out expressive form in the materials I choose; such form corresponds to a visual-kinesthetic dimensionality; a visceral necessity drawn by the senses to the finger of eye...a mobile, tactile event into which the eye leads the body; a picture plane as dimensional as dream is, or landscape.”<sup>158</sup> Through material and motion in paintings and performance, Schneemann demonstrates that the lived perspective, what Merleau-Ponty called “being-in-the-world,” breaks down dichotomies of mind/body and subject/object.

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<sup>157</sup> Notations, 950001, series III, box 27, folder 6, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

<sup>158</sup> *Meat Joy*, 1964, 950001, series I, box 1, folder 8, Carolee Schneemann Papers 1959-1994, Getty Research Institute, California.

## CONCLUSION

Schneemann's *Up To and Including Her Limits* (fig. 14) brings together the issues of materiality and movement present in all of her previously discussed works. First performed under the title "*Trackings*" in December 1973, at the Avant-Garde Festival in Grand Central Station in New York, *Up To and Including Her Limits* was re-performed by Schneemann several times between the years of 1974 and 1976, in London, New York and Basel. It was the performances after 1974 that gave *Up To and Including Her Limits* its signature appearance.<sup>159</sup> In the work Schneemann, suspended naked in a harness, used the tension of her body to move around the space, creating marks with a crayon on the surrounding walls and floor covered in paper. A projector with no image ran in front of the space, illuminating the harness. On either side of the installation were two columns of three television monitors displaying a recorded video of previous performances. In *Imaging Her Erotics*, Schneemann describes the energies behind *Up To and Including Her Limits*:

As a landscape painter I occupied fields of shifting forms, physical sensations of wind, light, temperature effecting my perceptions. I sat in fields, marshes on the edge of frozen ponds. My oil paints were warmed over the flames of candles stuck into the snow...By the sixties I took the painting surface into three dimensions with collage, objects and motorized elements. This was the obvious implication of abstract expressionism. The work of Pollock, de Kooning, could only be viewed with optical muscularity—the entire body was active.<sup>160</sup>

In this passage Schneemann connects her roots as a landscape painter and the Abstract Expressionist gesture as the joint foundation for the creation of this work. Schneemann

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<sup>159</sup> Schneemann, *Imaging*, 165. Also performed in 1990 at the Venice Biennale.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

also links her materials (oil paint, objects, and collage) and the use of the movement of her body in her work, an idea that I have argued connects her entire practice.

Schneemann derived the imagery in *Up To and Including Her Limits* from her surrounding landscape; she was inspired to create the work when a neighbor came to prune an apple tree on her property. When he took a break for lunch, Schneemann asked if she could try out his tree surgeon's harness and upon his agreement she undressed and lifted herself into the harness, later stating a desire to "float naked" as her reason for undressing.<sup>161</sup> The subsequent performance originated from the landscape, but was also linked to Schneemann's interest in breaking down the picture plane. The images of Schneemann in the tree harness on her property display her body as a dominant horizontal in the landscape, in contrast to the verticality of the trees surrounding her. The activation of space that occurred with *Up To and Including Her Limits* has been integral to Schneemann's process since her time in graduate school at the University of Illinois, and relates to her manipulation of space in her paintings and painting-constructions, as well as her first event *Labyrinths*, a work also inspired by a fracture of the natural landscape.

Schneemann equated her experience in the tree harness on her property with the breakdown of pictorial space found in Paul Cézanne's painting, as well as the Abstract Expressionist-like gesture that she integrated into the performance. Regarding this work, Schneemann writes: "Cézanne's layering of space into shifting planes had demanded an increased kinetic response of eye and body, which was carried forward by the Abstract

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<sup>161</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 226.

Expressionists.”<sup>162</sup> In this quote Schneemann links a phenomenological response in viewing Cézanne’s paintings to those of the Abstract Expressionists. Additionally, Schneemann has linked the process of Jackson Pollock and *Up To and Including Her Limits*, writing: “the direct result of Pollock’s physicalized painting process...my extended arm holds crayons which stroke the surrounding walls, accumulating a web of colored marks. My entire body becomes the agency of visual traces, vestige of the body’s energy in motion.”<sup>163</sup>

The body in motion was integral to *Up To and Including Her Limits*, as it was in Schneemann’s other Kinetic Theater works. In *Eye Body* (fig. 1) Schneemann collaged her body and completed a series of performative actions involving the painting-constructions in her studio in order to claim her body as material for her art, a move which she continued with *Meat Joy* (fig. 2) and *Fuses* (fig. 3). In *More Than Meat Joy*, Schneemann writes: “Until discomfort or loss of concentration, I function as a pencil.”<sup>164</sup> With *Up To and Including Her Limits* her body is fully integrated as material, largely because of the physical motion of her body in the harness. Schneemann understood her body and her gesture as material, a “thing among things,” a fusion of self and world.<sup>165</sup> In her creation of the gestural marks, made by her body in motion, Schneemann presented herself as not only object, but also subject. In *Site*, the immobility of Schneemann’s position made identification as subject impossible, but her mobility in *Up To and Including Her Limits*, defied identification as strictly object, a desire present in her entire body of work.

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<sup>162</sup> Schneemann, *Imaging*, 255.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>164</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 231.

<sup>165</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 124-125.

*Up To and Including Her Limits* is also representative of a shift in Schneemann's performative work in which she moved from the planned and rehearsed performances of her Judson days, which includes *Meat Joy*, to works that are singular, meaning she was the only participant. Schneemann highlights this shift in the preparatory materials for *Up To and Including Her Limits*, published in *Imaging Her Erotics*: "My intentions were TO DO AWAY WITH: (1) Performance, (2) A fixed audience, (3) Rehearsals (4) Improvisation, (5) Sequences, (6) Conscious intention, (7) Technical cues, (8) A central metaphor or theme. What was left?"<sup>166</sup> Schneemann and her body were what was left. Schneemann again presented her naked body as singular, active form, in her most well-known performance, *Interior Scroll* (fig. 4).

The years that I have covered end in 1974, a year before Schneemann created *Interior Scroll*. I have deliberately defined the scope of this study to exclude *Interior Scroll*, the work most often theorized, in connection to feminist art production, to further highlight an integral aspect of her practice—the role of painting. In Chapter One, Schneemann is quoted discussing a mind/body split in her own work, writing that the physicality of the performative works has prevented her larger body of work, the paintings, objects and installations in particular, from being understood and theorized in connection with her performative works. Kristine Stiles reinforces this position, stating that Schneemann's relationship to painting is needed in order to fully understand Schneemann's process, otherwise the work is occluded "by the artist herself."<sup>167</sup> This statement suggests that the erotic undertones in Schneemann's work and her use of her body as material overshadows other considerations of her work, which is supported in the theorization of

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<sup>166</sup> Schneemann, *Imaging*, 165.

<sup>167</sup> Stiles, "The Painter as an Instrument," 3.

Schneemann's practice in terms of contemporary Feminist and Body Art. This thesis instead contributes to the theorization of Schneemann's painting, but not to the exclusion of her feminist concerns. By considering work prior to *Interior Scroll* and using the theories of Merleau-Ponty to find a place for her practice within feminist production, as well as within the concurrent criticism of the period in the writings of Greenberg, Fried, Rosenberg and Kaprow, I am shifting the focus on the discourse of Schneemann to address the role of painting to her entire oeuvre, in order to recognize her placement in the history of painting and solidify her role within both modernist and postmodernist practice.



**Figure 1** Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions*, 1963. Photographs by Erró.

Reproduced from “Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions 1963,” Carolee Schneemann, <http://www.caroleeschneemann.com>.





**Figure 2** Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*, 1964.

Reproduced from "Meat Joy 1964," Carolee Schneemann,  
<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com>.



**Figure 3** Carolee Schneemann, *Fuses*, 1964-66, 16 mm film, 18 min.

Reproduced from "Carolee Schneemann," Museum of Modern Art,  
<http://www.moma.org>.



**Figure 4** Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975.

Reproduced from "Interior Scroll 1975," Carolee Schneemann,  
<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com>.



**Figure 5** Carolee Schneemann, *Untitled, October 1959*, oil on paper, 20 x 26 inches.

Reproduced from “Carolee Schneemann: Within and Beyond the Limits,” Krannert Art Museum, <http://kam.illinois.edu/pr/schneemann/index.html>.





**Figure 6** Carolee Schneemann, *Landscape*, 1959, oil on canvas, 32x35 inches.

Reproduced from Schneemann, Carolee. *Up To and Including Her Limits*. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997.



**Figure 7** Carolee Schneemann, *Newspaper Event*, 1963.

Reproduced from Glimcher, Mildred L. *Happenings New York, 1958-1963*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2012.





**Figure 8** Paul Cézanne, *Bathers*, 1902-1904, oil on canvas, 9 3/8 x 10 11/16 inches.

Reproduced from Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org/>.



**Figure 9** Carolee Schneemann, *Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, 1958, oil on canvas, 46x32 inches.

Reproduced from *Carolee Schneemann: Within and Beyond the Premises* (New Paltz: Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art and State University of New York at New Paltz, 2010).





**Figure 10** Carolee Schneemann, *Tenebration*, 1961, mixed media, 52 ½ x 46 inches.

Reproduced from "Carolee Schneemann," P.P.O.W. Gallery,  
<http://www.ppowgallery.com>.



**Figure 11** Carolee Schneemann, *Sir Henry Francis Taylor*, 1961, mixed media, 54 ½ x 39 x 6 1/2 inches.

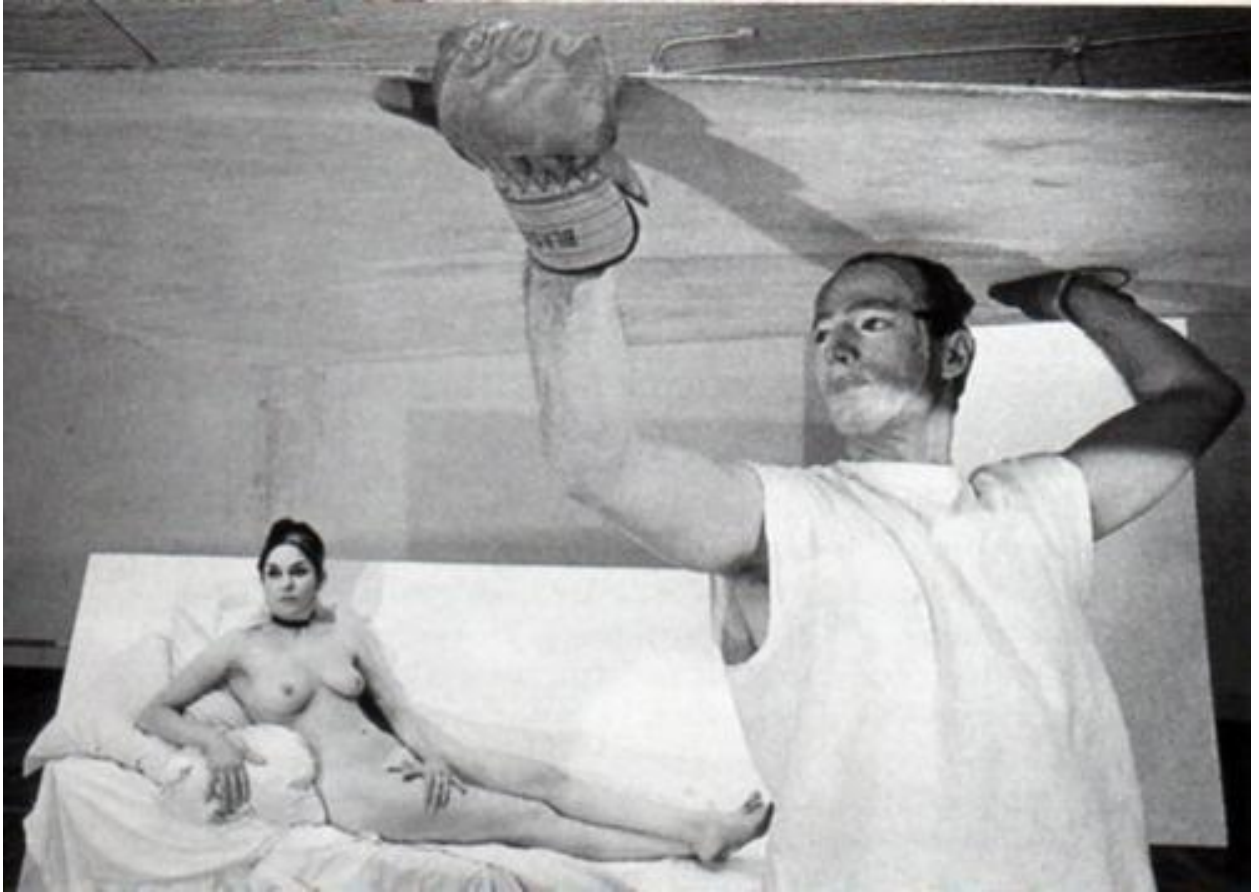
Reproduced from *Carolee Schneemann: Within and Beyond the Premises* (New Paltz: Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art and State University of New York at New Paltz, 2010).





**Figure 12** Carolee Schneemann, *Four Fur Cutting Boards*, 1963, mixed media, 52 ½ x46 inches.

Reproduced from “Carolee Schneemann,” P.P.O.W. Gallery,  
<http://www.ppowgallery.com>.



**Figure 13** Carolee Schneemann and Robert Morris, *Site*, 1964.

Reproduced from Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org/>.



**Figure 14** Carolee Schneemann, *Up to and Including Her Limits*, 1973-1976

Reproduced from "Carolee Schneemann, Up to and Including Her Limits,"  
<http://www.artperformance.org>.

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